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Capps, Markey, Matsui Re-Introduce Legislation to Improve the Public Health Response to Climate Change

Bill Would Support Research, Surveillance, Planning and Interagency Coordination

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today Congresswoman Lois Capps (CA-23) was joined by Congressman Ed Markey (MA-5) and Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-5) and some of the nation's leading public health advocates in announcing the re-introduction of legislation to improve the public health response to climate change. The Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act would address the negative health effects related to climate change by supporting research, surveillance, planning and interagency coordination. The bill was first introduced in the 110th Congress, and was incorporated into the "American Clean Energy and Security Act," which passed the House of Representatives, but did not become law.

"One of the most troubling areas where climate change's impact is immediately felt is in its negative effect on public health. We see it firsthand in our families as more of our kids struggle with asthma and allergies. And we see it regardless of whether or not members of Congress deny climate change is happening and that humans are even partially to blame. We have to provide our public health officials with the tools and resources they need to track and effectively combat the public health challenges posed by climate change," said Congresswoman Capps.

Climate change is a concern for public health agencies and is often attributed to be a significant factor in recent increases in: allergies, asthma and other respiratory illnesses; emerging tropical diseases; life-threatening temperatures; and drought and food shortages. While public health officials recognize the negative impact of climate change few have resources to tackle the problem, according to a [national survey](#) conducted in 2008 by Environmental Defense Fund, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and George Mason University.

"Planets don't have emergency rooms. It is time that we follow our doctors' orders and prepare for the impacts of climate change as we also work to reduce global warming pollution. With "the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act" we now have an extraordinary opportunity to become more resilient to the climate impacts we face today and prepare for the worse impacts that are predicted to come," said Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.), Ranking Member on the Natural Resources Committee and senior member of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

"Climate change threatens both the health of our planet as well as public health; and failure to address these changes is a failure to protect us all. That is why I am such a strong supporter of Congresswoman Capps' Climate Change Health and Protection Act, which will help provide us with the tools to fight the negative effects of climate change, specifically in regards to public health," said Congresswoman Doris Matsui (CA-05), an original co-sponsor of the legislation.

"Climate change poses a real and present health threat for our country today. It can affect the air we breathe and the water we drink. It also can severely threaten our nation's food supply. If left unaddressed, climate change could exact an enormous toll on communities across the nation," said Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (E), Executive Director of APHA. "The bill introduced today would send a real lifeline to public health officials who are on the frontlines of protecting our health, preventing disease and keeping families safe. We are grateful to Rep. Capps and Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) for supporting this important and urgently needed piece of public health legislation."

Congresswoman Capps' legislation would help improve the public health response to the challenges posed by climate change by directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a National Strategic Action Plan to assist health professionals in preparing for and responding to the public health effects of climate change. It would also authorize funding for the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) to research the health effects of climate change and health implications of potential greenhouse gas reduction strategies, as well as bolster climate change preparedness planning around the country.

Congresswoman Capps legislation bill also would authorize the Centers for Disease Control to:

- Provide technical support to state, local, and tribal health departments in forecasting local effects, developing preparedness plans, and communicating with the public about the health effects of climate change;

- Develop training programs for public health professionals on the health risks and interventions related to climate change;
- Enhance domestic and international tracking capacity for infectious diseases and environmental health indicators;
- Develop a coordinated research and preparedness agenda on climate and health by working with other Federal agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Department of Energy
- Contract with the [National Research Council](#) and [Institute of Medicine](#) to prepare a report that assesses the needs for health professionals to prepare for and respond to climate change impacts on public health and recommends programs to meet those needs. The report would be due within 18 months after the bill becomes law.

A summary of the Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act Follows:

As the negative impact of global warming continues to intensify, human health problems related to climate change will increase. Examples of such health problems are:

- o Emerging tropical diseases: Warmer climates are more hospitable to parasites, mosquitoes, and other disease-carrying organisms.
- o Life-threatening temperatures: Climate models indicate global warming will cause an increase in heat waves.
- o An increase in allergies and asthma: Rising temperatures increase ozone smog, worsening the conditions of people suffering from respiratory diseases.
- o Drought and food shortages: Global warming threatens our food supply, water supply, and water quality.

The Climate Change Health Protection and Promotion Act directs the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a National Strategic Action Plan to assist health professionals in preparing for and responding to the public health effects of climate change.

SENSE OF CONGRESS

The Act establishes a Sense of Congress that directs all levels of government to prepare for and respond to the public health impacts of climate change, with an emphasis on adequately

preparing health professionals and protecting vulnerable populations and developing nations. It also advances research, education, and collaborative efforts related to public health and climate change.

NATIONAL STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

The Act directs the HHS Secretary, acting through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to publish a National Strategic Action Plan to assist health professionals in preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change on public health. The creation and revision of the National Strategic Action Plan will be made in conjunction with a number of Federal, State, local, and tribal agencies, as well as other stakeholders. The Act prioritizes research, monitoring, education, and outreach, and also directs the CDC to conduct and fund research and preparedness planning. The Secretary is required to revise the National Strategic Action Plan every four years.

ADVISORY BOARD

The Act establishes a permanent scientific advisory board to provide scientific and technical advice and recommendations to the Secretary of HHS.

REPORTS

The Act requires the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine to issue a report to Congress, no later than 18 months after the date of enactment, that assesses the needs regarding climate change and public health domestically and internationally, and recommends programs to meet those needs. After the initial report, every four years the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine will submit periodic reports to Congress that review scientific developments on health impacts of climate change and recommend changes to the National Strategic Action Plan.

AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS

The Act authorizes all appropriated funds to be made available to the Secretary. It also gives the Secretary authority to distribute those funds to other departments and agencies of the Federal government and foreign, State, tribal and local governments.

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